

So Close, Yet So Distant

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Summary: Version Two. Jenna has a lot going on in her life with the Elemental Stars, the last thing she needs is love...or is it? Chapter Three up!

***Chapter 1*: Prologue**

Hi there! Yes, I've re-written SCYSD, because I really grew to hate the first one. For those that read the first one, I hope you find this one more satisfactory, and to all my reviewers, thank you SO much, you were brilliant :) The storyline is more or less the same, but the chapters will differ a lot. So, I hope you enjoy :)

So Close, Yet So Distant

Written by Xanda

Chapter One : Prologue

In the land of Weyard, there lived Adepts. An Adept was defined as somebody who could control a potentially dangerous power, associated with the Elements. Fire, Water, Earth, and Wind were the four elements that made up everything on Weyard. Everybody knew of the Elements, but few knew of the Adepts, who preferred to keep it that way. Normal humans feared Adepts, and as the human population vastly outnumbered the Adept population, it was not wise for the Adepts to make the humans known of their presence, for fear of rebellion. And so the Adepts tried to lead normal life amongst humans, keeping their power secret.

One particular town defied this, however. The town of Vale, which resided on Angara, consisted of nothing but Adepts, and so they were free to use and harness their power without fear of being attacked. Vale was sealed off to all outsiders, though there were occasional exceptions. This was with good reason – hidden within Vale were the

Elemental Stars, and these sacred stones couldn't be touched. The Stars were the pure source of the Elements, and disturbing these would bring about a great disaster, or so the Valean legends said.

There was one particular legend that stated that if the opposing Elements ever merged, then a great power would be unleashed. Again, this was potentially dangerous, and so a law was passed that Adepts of opposing Elements may not interact for long. It was especially enforced that opposing Elements could not forge relationships. Doing so was extremely dangerous, according to legend. Mars (or Fire) Adepts were therefore forbidden from prolonged interaction with Mercury, or Water Adepts. Jupiter (Wind) was also restricted from forging relationships with Venus (Earth).

There were those who scoffed at this legend, and believed it to be something that was invented to stop the uniting of opposing Elements. One particular Mars Adept was one of those that believed this. This Mars Adept was a resident of Vale, and as Vale was made up of Venus and Mars Adepts, she had no reason to complain, and yet she believed that the Adepts were slowly being restricted. Her name was Jenna, and she would go on to defy this legend...

"There he goes again...few seconds, maybe?"

"No, we waited too long. We'll have to wait until he comes back around, and then goes back again..."

"Are you sure? If we go in about five seconds, and run, we might make it."

"Might, Jenna, might. Last time I was caught sneaking up here, I couldn't sit down for days."

"Yeah, but you thought you saw a coin on the floor, and actually stopped to pick it up."

"How was I supposed to know the guy had just turned back around the corner? Sheesh."

"Keep your voice down! Look, he's going back around again..."

"All right...one...two...two and a half-"

"Isaac!"

"All right, now!"

From the dense shrubbery came two teenagers, and without looking behind them, they sprinted up a small hill, and up the steps. Knowing they would be out of sight there, they stopped for breath, and grinned at each other.

"We made it!" The girl, Jenna, clutched a stitch in her side. She had long reddish hair that fell to her waist when it was down. Today it was held up in a ponytail, though several strands framed her slim face. Her eyes were only a couple of shades darker than her hair. Being a resident of Vale, she was an Adept, a Mars Adept to be specific. She was quite tall for her age, though she lacked the maturity of an average seventeen year old. She giggled at the thought of being caught by the Sanctum guardians, as the two had narrowly missed being seen by a particularly strict one.

"Yeah, don't count your chickens yet, though," The boy spoke up, smiling despite himself. He had sandy coloured hair that seemed to defy gravity, and his eyes matched the colour of the ocean at midday. His name was Isaac, and he was only a couple of months younger than Jenna. He wore a yellow scarf, even in the immense heat of the summer, as a

tribute to his father, who had died a few years earlier. He was also an Adept, but he was aligned with Earth, something of which he was proud, even if he did have an odd fetish for houseplants.

"We're so close, now..." Jenna gazed toward the large, forbidden building looming just ahead of the two. "Kraden's been talking about this place for ages, but I think we're the first to see it in a long while. It's quite pretty for a building." Isaac snorted.

"Yeah, but it's what's *inside* that counts." Inside, he brimmed with excitement. After hearing all about the legends that lay inside, he was dying to wrench open the doors and see them for himself. "Come on, we didn't come this far to back out now." The two headed for the sacred Sanctum, dubbed Sol Sanctum.

As they walked, Jenna glanced toward Isaac, wondering why on Weyard he had come with her. She had been independent for years after all, after her parents and brother were killed in a tragic storm. But, after hearing about her plan to see Kraden's teachings for herself, Isaac had jumped at the opportunity to assist her. Not that Jenna was complaining, in fact secretly, she was glad. Isaac had taken care of her since she was orphaned, and he seemed so much more than just a friend. He was handsome, caring, and strong, and he was also the only one with whom Jenna could share her thoughts of the tragic incident three years earlier. The accident had claimed her family, and Isaac's father, and though the two rarely spoke of it, there was an unspoken understanding between the two. Of course, she had other friends, Gareth in particular seemed to value her friendship, but Isaac was special. And it was that that made Jenna glad that he was with her today.

"...Jenna?"

She snapped out of her thoughts, and found herself at the entrance to Sol Sanctum. Her heart pounded with excitement. *This was it.* She had been completely fascinated with the legends and tales that Kraden had spoken of during their many lessons on Alchemy with him, and had always secretly harboured an ambition to one day see the Sanctum's glory for herself. Isaac stood by the entrance, and grinned. He, too, seemed to feel the same excitement, and Jenna wondered if he had come for the same reasons that she had.

"Heave..." Isaac pulled at the heavy door, and managed to open it so they could both fit through. "Af-after you," he panted. Jenna quickly slipped in through the opening, and Isaac followed quickly. The door shut with a resounding *bang*.

"Well," Jenna commented as they walked through the first corridor, "this was...umm..."

"Unexpected," Isaac finished for her. They had been expecting something other than a large blue corridor, something that perhaps gave off an aura of incredible power, but then, Isaac reasoned, they wouldn't put it in the entrance hall. It would be too easy to reach.

"Hmmm," Jenna walked into the room at the end of the long corridor, and surveyed the surroundings. Nothing too interesting, except for the large picture of the moon engraved into the floor. "Luna? But...aren't we in the Sol Sanctum? This doesn't make much sense..."

"There'll be something else," Isaac said, pointing down a small corridor that evidently led to another room. "All right, I'll go and have a quick look. Wait here, and if something

happens, shout for me." With that, he wandered into the next room. "Now, this makes sense," he said quietly, looking at the floor. A picture of Sol was carved into the marble. "But apart from that...nothing."

Glancing around, Isaac frowned. This definitely wasn't what he expected. "I'm going to look for a switch, or a lever, or something!" Isaac called through to the next room.

"All right, be careful!" Was the response.

Isaac wandered up the stairs, and walked into a larger room. This one contained four statues of beautiful women, and a picture of Luna was engraved on the floor. Isaac gasped as he saw four switches by the statues. "I found it! Yes!" He ran to the nearest statue, and pushed it with all of his might onto the large panel. It hit its target, and the image of Luna suddenly started turning into a faint one of Sol. "Aha!" Isaac cried happily, and ran to the next statue. However, before he reached it, there was a terrible noise, and a sudden earthquake sent him to his feet. Lightning started striking the floor, and Isaac had to roll around for a couple of minutes, before being able to stabilize himself without being struck.

"Isaac!" The anguished cry came from downstairs, and as Isaac got to his feet, panicked, Jenna ran up the stairs into the room. She looked terrified.

"Jenna! What happened?"

"I know what caused the storm!" she cried, running to the statue and heaving it off the switch. The sudden earthquake stopped, and there was no more lightning. Jenna leaned against the statue in sheer relief, breathing heavily. "It was this. The Sanctum. It caused the storm!"

"What?" Isaac took Jenna by the shoulders, and gazed into her eyes. "How do you know?"

"I don't know! I saw things, things that happened three years ago!" Isaac knew immediately that she was referring to the night the boulder crashed down on Vale. "The storm was the same, except stronger," Jenna closed her eyes, breathing deeply. "The whole room went dark, and I could hear the storm roaring, and..."

Isaac stared into her eyes, hardly daring to believe it. "Then...this room is a trap or something. And if that's true...then we're not the first to reach this room in a while. Someone else was here, three years ago..." He had a sudden flashback – it was raining, he was crying about something, two strangers were approaching him angrily – and then it was gone. Isaac noticed Jenna was exceptionally pale, and he pulled her into an embrace. "It's all right. We don't have to carry on."

"No." Jenna pulled back, and shook her head, still breathing rather deeply. "We've come this far..."

Isaac grinned. "Knew you'd say something like that. Well, there must be something here to disarm that; otherwise it wouldn't be possible to reach the Stars. There's another room there," he pointed toward what looked like another large room.

The two of them walked in, and saw another few statues. However, there was a larger one in the centre, carrying a large stone tablet. "That could be it," commented Jenna, walking toward one statue. She gave it a test push, and found that once it was on the switch, nothing happened. She breathed in relief. "Hey, look, it's making a hole in the floor."

Isaac looked, and sure enough, a faint hole had appeared just in front of the large statue. "I'll bet this other one...yep," he had pushed the other statue onto the switch, and the faint hole became a true hole, large enough to pull the big statue into it. Isaac approached it, and started concentrating his Venus energy into Psynergy. With this, he moved the large statue into the hole. A large click indicated that they had disarmed the trap.

"All right, now it should be safe," Isaac walked through to the other room, Jenna following, walking slightly faster than usual.

"Just to make sure..." Jenna heaved a statue onto one of the switches, and tensed. Isaac got ready to pull the statue back off the switch if need be, but nothing happened. The picture of Luna changing to Sol was clearer, however. "It's safe. Come on, if we shift the others I bet something will happen."

It took a short while, as neither Jenna nor Isaac were particularly strong, but once all four statues were on their respective switches, the Luna picture had vanished, and Sol was in its place. Jenna grinned. "Something must have changed! Maybe it was downstairs, though."

The two, unable to contain their excitement, ran down the stairs, and into the Sol room. However, apart from the image on the floor changing into Luna, nothing else had changed. Jenna scanned the area, but found nothing unusual. "Strange...I wonder why nothing's happened? Isaac, what are you doing?"

Isaac had walked into the other room, attracted by a beam of blue light. Jenna quickly followed, and gasped when she saw the light led to a portal. Isaac punched his fist into the air triumphantly, and hastened to the portal. Jenna followed,

and reached out to touch it. It shimmered and distorted when her fingertips made contact. She amused herself for a few seconds, making the portal ripple much like water, and giggled, unable to contain her enthusiasm. "Well, this is it! It must be..."

"We'll soon find out," Isaac stepped back a couple of paces, and then ran and leapt into the portal. Jenna ran up, suddenly concerned for Isaac's safety, but his voice floated through from the other side, telling her it was all right. Jenna followed suit, and leapt in after him.

"Oof..." Jenna landed awkwardly, and stood up to see Isaac looking out across the room. "Oh, wow!" Jenna's eyes had never seen such a beautiful display. A large chasm stretched out as far as the eye could see, and it glimmered with a lovely, greenish glow. Dotted across the chasm were small platforms, and more statues stood at the end of these, on larger platforms. There were four in total, and each seemed to be holding a ball of light. They were different colours, and Jenna quickly realised what they actually were.

"Isaac! This is it! We're in the Inner Sanctum!" Jenna jumped up and down, ecstatic. Isaac was slightly calmer, though inside his heart was leaping around in joy.

"Jenna, do you realise where we are? So many people long to see this with their own eyes, and now here we are!"

"Look, there's Mars!" Jenna had found the statue holding the Mars Star, and felt her Psynergy warm. "Such power..."

"Nah, Venus is better," said Isaac, staring at the orange Star. Its glow was irresistible, and he felt somehow stronger watching the light pulsate.

"Hah," Jenna grinned at Isaac, "don't forget who won that fight at Vale last year. I believe Kurt is a Mars, I repeat, Mars Adept."

"Koln tripped over his own feet," Isaac retorted, sticking his tongue out at Jenna. His face suddenly turned serious. "Hey, did Kraden say anything about holding the Stars?"

"Umm..." Jenna quickly cast her memory back to the lessons on the Elemental Stars, "yeah, if all four are taken, then the Sanctum will react badly. The Stars are used to light the Elemental Lighthouses, right? Kraden says that if that happens, then the world will be saved."

" 'Saved?' But, the teachings of Vale say that Alchemy's dangerous..."

Jenna smirked. "Yeah, maybe Kraden wants to take over Weyard or something."

Isaac laughed, and then returned his gaze to the Venus Star. "But holding one at a time...that can't be too dangerous..."

Jenna gazed at Isaac, smiling. His eyes were alight with excitement. "I suppose that'd be all right. You first, though. I'm worth too much if something happens."

"Ha ha, I'm laughing my head off," Isaac grinned. "Just...before I go, can you promise me something?"

Jenna stared at him, noticing his sudden seriousness. "Uhm, I guess. What is it?"

"Promise me that if anything happens, you'll run. We don't know for sure what'll happen when I get this stone, the whole place might flood or something."

Jenna laughed nervously. "Always the pessimistic one. But what about you?"

"I'll be all right," Isaac took her shoulders gently, and gazed into her warm eyes. "Please, Jenna, for me?"

Jenna grinned. "All right, I promise, but nothing's going to happen." Why was Isaac so anxious all of a sudden? Isaac smiled, grateful she hadn't questioned further. For some reason, he had a bad feeling about disturbing the Sanctum. But, he supposed, Kraden would have said something about just one Star being disturbed...he stepped toward the stepping-stones that would lead to the Venus Star. "Here goes nothing..." He inhaled, and then jumped to the platform. Apart from being a little slippery, due to a heavy growth of moss, it seemed fine.

"Hehe, one step closer!" shouted Jenna, grinning from ear to ear. She had been looking forward to seeing Sol Sanctum ever since she had first heard about it, but she hadn't been prepared for the immense excitement she was feeling. Still, Jenna was a little anxious about Isaac, after all, the chasm looked very deep. A sudden muffled sound coming from the portal distracted her, and she narrowed her eyes to scan the area. She could see nothing through the darkness however, and merely shrugged and got on with cheering Isaac along.

Isaac reached the larger platform, and hurried toward the statue, hardly able to contain his excitement. The Star's warm, orange glow strengthened Isaac's energy, and the air around the stone felt warm. Tentatively, he reached out, and laid a finger on the Star. It felt pleasantly warm, and feeling confident, he plucked it from the statue's ornate hands. It felt comforting, and at the same time, immensely powerful. "Wow..." he breathed, not able to manage much more.

"Thank you. Now, we shall relieve you of the rest."

Isaac whipped his head around. That voice hadn't belonged to Jenna, and yet it sounded oddly familiar. His eyes found two strangers in the darkness, one of which appeared to be holding Jenna's shoulders. Isaac could tell, even from this distance, that Jenna was afraid, and so it meant the two strangers could only mean trouble. Isaac rushed to the edge of the platform he was standing on, and suddenly saw a reflection from something the taller stranger was carrying. It was a sword, and the sight of the cold metal made Isaac's heart sink horribly.

"Don't just stand there, boy!" snapped the person holding Jenna. The voice belonged to a woman, and Isaac could just make her out in the dim lighting. "Bring us the Stars."

Isaac licked his dry lips, thinking hard. One wrong move could put Jenna at risk...he had to stall for time, so he could think of a plan. "You want this?" he asked, holding out the Venus Star.

"You only have one?" the stranger carrying the sword, a man, sounded impatient. He muttered something to his companion, who nodded. Jenna watched Isaac, wide-eyed. He shook his head very slightly, and Jenna understood that it meant, "don't fight them." The stranger turned back to Isaac. "Very well. Bring us the Star you have."

"And then go back, and fetch the others!" The woman said.

"What?" Isaac was worried – the others couldn't be disturbed, it was too dangerous. "The others? But that'll-"

"If you value her safety," the woman shook Jenna's shoulders, who closed her eyes fearfully, "then you will comply."

Isaac watched Jenna for a second, and then gazed at the Star. Much as he didn't want to disturb the Sanctum, he couldn't risk Jenna's safety. Besides, the legends of the great catastrophe if the Stars were disturbed hadn't been *proven*. "All right," he said softly, just loud enough for the others to hear. Without another word, he began jumping back across the platforms, and landed at the main platform without difficulty.

"On the floor," commanded the man. Up close, Isaac could see that he didn't look like the average human. His ears were pointed, and his skin, unless the light was tricking Isaac's eyes, was blue. The woman, in contrast, had fairly normal skin, apart from the deep red markings around her eyes. She carried the same pointed ears, though.

Isaac held the Star for the briefest of moments before depositing it on the ground. The warmth of it was gone, along with the comfort. Feeling slightly worse, Isaac turned slowly to head toward the Mercury Star. Before he jumped to the platform, however, he turned. "Just one thing,"

"You're not in a position to bargain," said the woman coldly.

"You'll have to get those Stars yourself, then," said Isaac, his temper rising. Jenna's eyes widened in horror. Behind her, the man stepped forward, and Isaac finally saw his true appearance in the dull light. There was no other word for it – he was menacing. His red eyes glared at Isaac, and Isaac felt a cold chill shoot up his spine.

"Bring us the Stars," he said, "and your friend will be safe." Behind him, Jenna stilled, knowing full well that she could be killed at any second.

"How do I know?" Isaac asked bravely. "How do I know you won't just kill her once I bring you the last one?"

"Relax," a voice issued from behind the portal, and again, it sounded oddly familiar. Jenna, in particular, seemed to recognise it, but she couldn't put her finger on where she had heard it before. The owner of the voice made an appearance through the portal. He had long brown hair, tied in a ponytail, and for some odd reason, was wearing a mask. Jenna stared at him, wondering why the mask was necessary. She also wondered why he didn't feel like a complete stranger. He spoke again, "you shall not be harmed." The newcomer stepped toward the blue man, though his expression was unreadable due to the mask. "That was our agreement, was it not?"

The blue man made a noise somewhere between annoyance and agreement. "There, you have your guarantee," he said coldly to Isaac. "Now go."

Knowing that this was the best guarantee he was going to get, Isaac jerked his head into a nod, and jumped between platforms to the Mercury Star. He walked up to the statue, and grabbed it from the statue's hands. This one felt cold in contrast with the Venus Star, and if Isaac strained his ears enough, he swore he could hear a faint noise of rushing water. As he turned to get back to the main plateau, a sudden tremor sent him to his knees.

"What?" the woman inhaled sharply; all four on the main platform hadn't fallen. "What was that? Surely not a repeat-?"

"No," the blue man spoke firmly. "We are safe. It's stopped."

Jenna exhaled in relief. If the tremor had been worse, Isaac might have fallen from the platform...she gave an involuntary shudder, and the woman tightened her grip on Jenna's shoulders. Out of the corner of her eye, Jenna saw

that the man in the mask had his gaze on her. Resisting another shudder, she turned back to watch Isaac come back with the Mercury Star, though her mind kept screaming "pervert!"

Isaac deposited the Mercury Star by the Venus Star, and immediately headed for the Jupiter Star, not wanting to anger the antagonists further. As he leapt from platform to platform, Jenna quickly glanced at the masked man a couple of times, thinking about why he seemed so familiar. She hadn't seen him around Vale before, and she'd never been permitted to leave the village, so where had she met him? Before her mind presented her with a possible answer, Isaac had taken the Jupiter Star, and it glowed a fierce purple in his hands.

"Finally, he's hurrying up..." the woman muttered.

All was not well, though. Another sudden tremor, this one more powerful than the last, sent Isaac to his knees again. Jenna lost her balance, and in the confusion of the tremor, the woman lost her grip on her. Standing up quickly, Jenna noticed the others were on their knees too, and she made to run toward the platform leading to Isaac's platform, when she remembered his words. *Promise me that if anything happens, you'll run.* She'd promised...but it made her anxious about what would happen to Isaac if she left him. His oceanic eyes met hers for the briefest of moments, and Jenna knew she had to keep her promise. Mid-step, she changed direction, and suddenly sprinted for the portal.

A shout behind her caused her heart to leap, and she only hoped she could outrun any possible pursuers. However, a few steps before she'd reached the portal, something suddenly appeared in front of her, blocking her path. Startled, Jenna halted quickly, but lost her balance again,

and fell to her knees. The tremors were continuing this time, and she found it hard to regain her footing, but someone grasped her arm, and helped her to her feet. "Hello there," came a pleasant voice, and Jenna looked up to see yet another stranger. This one was human, but had very blue hair, and aquamarine eyes. Was he here to help?

"Alex, don't let her escape!" cried the woman.

Maybe not.

The tremors subsided, and the relief of everyone in the room could be felt. Isaac, who had almost dropped the stone over the chasm during the earthquakes, stood, and prepared to jump back to the main platform. As he jumped back, the man in the mask strode over to where the newcomer was stood, still holding Jenna. His stance was that of an angry man.

"Let her go."

Jenna was confused. He was on *their* side, right? So why was he suddenly demanding her release? The man who held her, Alex, blinked in polite confusion.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You heard me. She isn't involved in any of this, Alex, and you aren't giving the orders around here."

"Ah. This is why I suggested you stayed behind when we came for the Elemental Stars." Alex was calm, something which puzzled Jenna. The average person would grow angry at such remarks. The man in the mask, in contrast, was getting angrier.

"I'm not letting anything getting in the way of the quest," he spat, "but there's no reason to involve my- innocents."

Jenna was too absorbed in the discussion to say anything. Something about what the masked man had said didn't make sense, and Jenna felt sure that he had been about to say something else.

"If that's how you feel, Felix, then I suggest you take it up with Saturos."

The masked man tensed. It took Jenna a few seconds to register the fact that Alex had called the masked man Felix. She blinked several times, forgetting their argument. Felix? That had been the name of her brother...but her brother was dead, killed in the tragic storm three years earlier. Her mind jumped to a sudden conclusion, and she inhaled sharply. Was that why he seemed so familiar? It couldn't possibly be...yet, stranger things had happened. Then again, there were plenty of Felix's in the world...but still...

"Are you all right?" The voice belonged to Alex the stranger, and he was looking down at her with some concern. Her sudden gasp of air must have startled him.

"I'm...fine," she said weakly, hardly daring to believe what her mind was telling her. Deep down, she did wish that it was her brother...but could it be possible? And if it really *was* Felix standing beside her, were her parents alive too?

"Hurry up!" the scaly man – Saturos, was it? – snapped at Isaac. Clearly, he was impatient.

Isaac had already deposited the Jupiter Star, and had almost reached the final one. Mars. Had the antagonists not invaded, Jenna would have been very excited, possibly jumping up and down with excitement. Now, however, she

was contemplating on whether her deceased brother was standing in front of her. She tugged her arm from Alex's grasp, and knowing she wasn't about to run, he conceded, and walked over to where Saturos and the woman were standing. Jenna stared at the masked man, who fidgeted uncomfortably. She narrowed her eyes, scanning for signs of familiarity.

"...Felix?"

Slowly, painfully, he reached up, and pulled off his mask. Yes, he was three years older, yes, his hair was longer, and yes, he'd lost some weight, but it was the same Felix that had drowned that fateful night...Jenna wasn't aware of anything else, and only when his hands settled on her shoulders did she realise that her knees had started shaking.

"Jenna. I'm...I mean...it's been a while."

Felix seemed as much at a loss for words as she was. Jenna gazed into those chocolate brown eyes, and saw the same emotions; though they appeared to hold more wisdom than last time she'd seen them. "I don't believe it..." And then the questions flowed. "How? When? What happened?" and the final: "why?"

"I couldn't come back. Believe me, I wanted to more than anything else in the world. The thought of leaving you alone almost killed me. But...I had business to carry out. It was unavoidable. I'm...sorry."

"Sorry?" Jenna's voice was harsh, and her heart plummeted. "Sorry? Surely nothing...nothing was as important as coming back! How could you?" Her eyes filled with tears. "How could you just leave, like that, letting everyone think you were dead?"

Felix opened his mouth to say more, but a sudden tremor, far stronger than any previous tremor, caught them off guard. Jenna and Felix were thrown to the floor, and around them, small rocks were leaping off the ground. This time, it wasn't steadying. The man named Saturos swore.

"Dammit, boy! Bring me that Star!"

Isaac had acquired the Mars Star, but the moment he had removed it from the statue, the earthquake had returned. Currently, he was holding onto the statue for dear life. "I c-can't!" Isaac's voice sounded panicked, and Jenna leapt to her feet, frightened for his life.

"Saturos," Alex's tone was urgent now, "I think we should leave."

"Alex, you're forgetting something. We're missing the final Star!" Saturos glared at him. "If you want to act the coward and leave now, I'm not stopping you."

Alex's tone turned icy. "We can return for it. This Sanctum will ensure that it can't be destroyed so easily."

"It?" Jenna finally found her voice. "What about Isaac? You can't just leave him here!"

"What do you suggest we do?" Alex asked her, shrugging his shoulders.

"We're more worried about that stone than your friend," Saturos said coldly. Jenna's blood turned to ice.

"I think we should leave, too," Felix said quickly, quite disturbed by the Sanctum's reactions. "The Mars Star will be safe, but if we don't leave, there will be nobody to carry out our quest."

"Felix!" Isaac shouted to his former friend. He could hardly dare believe his eyes, and yet a living Felix was standing with the antagonists. "Make them see sense, can't you?"

"I'm on their side," Felix informed Isaac coldly. Jenna froze at his response. This *wasn't* Felix, at least not the one she'd known. He didn't care about them anymore...

"This isn't working," Saturos said, frustrated with the events. "Alex. Take her, and the Stars, and get back to the ship. We'll stay to get the final Star."

"What?" Felix jumped forward, looking at Saturos with wide eyes. "Why Jenna? She isn't involved in any of this!"

"The hostage card...quick thinking," Alex said softly. He nodded, finding no flaw with the plan, and scooped up the three Elemental Stars. He moved toward Jenna, but she backed off several paces.

"Stay away from me," she spat, "I wouldn't help you if my life depended on it."

"Unfortunately it does," said Alex.

"Alex, get a move on, we can't afford to lose the Stars we already have. Felix, stay here. That boy seems to recognise you, maybe you can talk sense into him." The woman gestured to the portal.

"Sorry about this," Alex apologised, before grabbing Jenna's arm, and concentrating his Psynergy. Jenna blinked, caught off guard, and suddenly found herself outside the Sanctum. What was more unusual was the fact that she found herself in what appeared to be a cabin on a sailing ship.

Alex released her, and walked over to a small table. He deposited the Elemental Stars there, and she picked one up and examined it with interest. "Make yourself at home."

After everything that had happened, and the sheer shock of seeing her brother alive and well again, the normality of that statement made Jenna laugh. She stood there for several moments, laughing at the absurdity of everything. Alex, slightly alarmed, looked up from the Mercury Star he was holding.

After her laughter had died, rather abruptly, Jenna glared at the blue-haired man. "Explain."

Alex frowned slightly. "Well, you shall need to be more specific."

His utter calmness was annoying Jenna, and she needed someone to vent her emotions onto. "Why are you stealing the Stars? Where the heck am I? And why am I here?"

"And we reach the inevitable." Alex resumed his admiring of the Mercury Star. "You're on a ship. Saturos's ship, to be exact. You're here because you happened to be in the Inner Sanctum when all of this came about. An unfortunate time and place."

"You didn't answer my first question," Jenna balled her fists in anger.

"I didn't see the need to."

Jenna's temper flared at this, and she strode to the nearest door, intending on getting off the ship and back to Sol Sanctum. She prayed that Isaac would be all right. However-

"I wouldn't bother if I was you," Alex said, not looking up from the Star. "The doors are locked. The authorities on this ship, using Psynergy, control them. Ingenious bit of craft, in my opinion."

Despite herself, Jenna stopped, and turned slowly to Alex. "Psynergy...? You're an Adept?"

"Of course," Alex finally looked up from the Mercury Star. "Aren't you? Being from Vale, I assumed you would be."

Jenna had always thought that Adepts outside of Vale had died out, but compared to earlier events, this piece of news didn't shock her. She nodded, slightly awestruck, and wordlessly produced a fireball in her palm. Alex watched with interest.

"Ah, Mars! Interesting." He smiled at her.

"Interesting, why?" Jenna narrowed her eyes at him. Alex put up his palms defensively.

"I've always been fascinated by fire. Mainly because of my ability to do this." He conjured the tiniest of rainstorms, and immediately doused the small fire in Jenna's hand. Her eyes widened. "I didn't even know I could do it until I was seven. Now, at least, I understand my strange passion for swimming."

He turned back to the Stars, and started examining Jupiter. Jenna gazed at him. He wasn't like the others, who were brutal, and demanding. Even Felix was rougher than usual...mind you, she hadn't seen him in three years. *Why are you standing here? Isaac's still out there, and you are still a hostage!* Jenna shook her head, angry at the fact that she had been distracted easily, and strode to the door.

"I repeat my earlier statement," came Alex's calm voice.

"Listen." Jenna decided that perhaps reasoning with him would get her out of here. "You don't need me here. I don't know what you're doing, and I don't really care at this moment in time. I'll only be a waste of space if I stay here. Wouldn't it just be easier for everyone if I just go home?"

"Possibly. However, I don't decide what goes on. Besides, I'm sure your brother would be delighted to get to know you again."

Jenna's eyes hardened. "I have no brother," she said mechanically.

"A little harsh, don't you think?" Alex looked at her. "He is your blood relative, after all."

"I don't care!" Jenna burst out. "He betrayed us, he betrayed me, and he should live with that regret for the rest of his life!" Alex said nothing. Letting out a sigh of pure frustration, Jenna marched to the door, and pulled on the doorknob. As predicted, it didn't shift.

"Do you listen to nothing I say?" Alex asked, a slight hint of amusement in his voice. This only served to anger Jenna.

"Let me out." The forced calmness of her voice sounded scary even to her.

"No can do," Alex replied cheerfully. "Why don't you take a seat instead? I'm sure we could force some conversation until Saturos and the others get back."

"Let me out!" Jenna glared at Alex.

"I have a better idea. You sit down, and help me figure out what these Stars are made of."

"Goddammit!" Jenna shouted. "You have no right to keep me in here!"

"Jenna?" A voice shouted from the other side of the door she was trying to wrench open.

"Felix?" Jenna stared at the wood.

"Listen, I'll explain everything afterwards. But I've come to get you out of here."

Felix's sudden switch of sides confused Jenna, but right now she had no time to be confused. "Really?"

Behind her, Alex forgot about the Stars, and he stood, staring at the same door. "Really, Felix, your loyalty isn't supposed to waver this much."

"Alex? Listen; just open the door, can't you? Jenna's not part of this."

"You can't open the door?" Jenna looked at the door in desperation. "Can't you force it down or something?"

Silence. Then suddenly, there was a loud bang, and the door shuddered on its hinges. Alex stepped forward.

"Felix, this really isn't the best of ideas. You know how violent Saturos and Menardi get. Betraying them now will only cause trouble later."

"Whose side are you on, Alex?" Felix shouted through the door, whilst still attempting to break it down.

"Stay out of this," snapped Jenna, glaring at Alex.

A third bang sent the door flying off its frame, and Jenna had to duck to avoid being hit. For the first time since the Sol Sanctum incident, Jenna was happy to see her brother standing in the doorway.

"Felix!" She rushed into his arms, and hugged him tightly. Maybe he wasn't the betraying brother after all. Felix returned the hug, and then slowly turned to face Alex.

"I realised something. Saturos and Menardi didn't need me at all. As of right now, I don't care what you do. I'm not staying. You can tell them what you want. I'm out of here."

"I'm not stopping you, Felix," Alex said, warning tones in his voice. "But beware – Saturos and Menardi won't take this lightly."

"Come on, Jenna," Felix took her hand, and together the two exited the ship, and headed back to Vale. Home.

That's the longest prologue I've ever written.

Alex: Aww, I'm quite nice in this chapter.

Ugh, I thought when I scrapped the old SCYSD; you'd gone with it.

Alex: Nice to see you too, Xanda.

I hope you enjoyed that. It's not a one-shot, there's more to come. Please leave a review, I like them.

***Chapter 2*: Determination**

Hello. Well, I was quite pleased with the way that chapter one came out. Here's chapter two for your enjoyment. Thanks to my reviewers for reviewing :)

So Close, Yet So Distant

Written by Xanda

Chapter Two : Determination

Two Months Later...

The town had never had so much gossip. If the townsfolk weren't talking about the recent Sol Sanctum incident, then they were chatting about the mysterious blue light that had flashed on the horizon some days ago. Indeed, Vale had never seemed so busy and friendly.

Felix and Jenna had made it back to Vale without hindrance, though they kept hidden in the dense forests in case they happened upon Saturos and Menardi. Once back through the gates of Vale, they found the town itself to be quite safe, though there was a large river of molten sludge bypassing the town. Frightened, Jenna had run straight back up to the entrance of Sol Sanctum to find Isaac. Thankfully, when she reached the smaller Sanctum guarding the entrance, it was to find a very tearful Dora, Isaac's mother, and a bruised and grazed Isaac.

Jenna herself cried when she found Isaac was safe. The two hugged, each glad that the other was safe. Isaac had been particularly worried when Jenna had been kidnapped. However, when questioned, he refused to speak of what had

happened after Jenna had been taken. A couple of days later, when the residents of Vale started to return to normal business, the Sanctum guardians probed Isaac, Jenna and Felix further. Their relief at finding Felix had not died after all was quickly making way for question after question. How had he survived? What had caused him to enter the Sanctum? What had happened? These questions seemed to annoy him, and he refused to answer many, choosing to lapse into silence when the Sanctum guards questioned them.

When it emerged that three of the four Elemental Stars had been stolen, the elders had panicked, and extra defences were placed around Vale. Guards had been employed to guard the sturdier gates built at Vale's entrance. The elders, meanwhile, shut themselves in the Sanctum, and discussed ways in which they would retrieve the Elemental Stars. Until they came up with a plan, there was a ban on leaving or entering Vale. The residents grew uneasy, and the gossip quickly grew more sinister.

Isaac and Felix had agreed not to argue in front of Jenna, who was relieved that they were both safe. However, they were both very frosty toward each other when Jenna wasn't with them. Isaac couldn't forgive Felix for betraying them, and for helping the people who had kidnapped Jenna. Felix, in contrast, was annoyed by Isaac's lack of understanding, and so the two avoided each other as much as possible. However, the Sol Sanctum incident had scared Jenna into thinking that something dangerous was going to happen, and so she insisted on staying with both Isaac and Felix during the day, just in case something happened.

Felix had not yet told Jenna that their parents were still alive. He had been looking for the opportune moment to sneak out of Vale and go directly to Prox. After the Sol

Sanctum incident, he hadn't trusted Saturos and Menardi at all, and he refused to help them in exchange for his parents' safety. However, Jenna had been keeping close to Felix ever since Sol Sanctum, and he couldn't sneak out at night because of the extra guard. Also, if he disappeared, Jenna would be heartbroken, and Felix hadn't wanted to cause his sister more pain. His plan wouldn't have worked anyway, even if he had managed to get out of Vale, because he didn't have a ship. Crossing the northern reaches was nothing short of suicide, and once in Prox, he would be questioned by every Proxian about Saturos and Menardi. If they learned that he had abandoned them, they would probably exile him, and his parents wouldn't be allowed to leave.

A few days ago, Vale had been shocked out of their siestas by a brilliant blue flash. Isaac and Jenna had raced out of their respective homes to find a ball of blue energy sitting on the horizon, just visible above the mountains that surrounded Vale. Both had found Kraden standing by his cottage, staring at the light in amazement. He had calmed down enough to tell the two that the light's source was Mercury Lighthouse. This was bad news, as the teachings of Vale had stated that if the Lighthouses were lit, a terrible disaster would wreak havoc on Weyard.

Felix had been incredibly calm at this news, and it was then that Isaac and Jenna began to get suspicious. They probed him for a couple of days, before he finally relented, and answered some questions.

"Felix, you're hiding something," Jenna sat on the edge of the river, dipping her feet into the cool water. She looked at her brother in concern. "You've been withdrawn ever since the incident."

Felix said nothing, as per usual, and instead stared into the blue water. He had been forcing himself to tell Jenna about their parents, and as icy as his relationship was with Isaac, Isaac also deserved to know that his father was still alive. However, he couldn't think how to break the news. It wouldn't be easy to rescue them, and telling Jenna and Isaac that their parents were in Saturos and Menardi's hometown would send them into a panic.

"I've got a question," said Isaac, though Felix was almost certain what was coming. "How come you were so calm during that blue light flash? Don't you remember Vale's teachings? The world could be in danger!"

"You're wrong," said Felix softly, but he didn't elaborate. Jenna sighed in annoyance.

"We've had this argument too many times! Felix, please," Jenna gazed into her brother's eyes, trying to discern an emotion. "Whatever you say, we're not going to hate you."

Speak for yourself, thought Isaac. *He's still in cahoots with those Sol Sanctum people!*

"You say that too easily," said Felix, refusing to meet his sister's eyes. He looked to the sky instead. "Once I explain, you'll probably want to exile me or something." Beside him, Isaac couldn't contain a snort of agreement.

It appeared that Jenna had had enough. She jumped to her feet and glared down at Felix. "For Weyard's sake! I'm sick of having this same conversation, over and over again! Felix, I'm your sister. Even if I don't end up agreeing with your reasoning, I'll still listen! And Isaac, at least give him a chance to explain! Don't try to hide it; I know you two have been at each other's throats lately! Felix, whatever it is, spit it out!"

Felix stared at the sky for a fraction longer, and then sighed, knowing he couldn't avoid it any longer. He started explaining about what had happened after the storm, how he'd been rescued. Jenna tried to interrupt, asking why he couldn't have returned to Vale, but Felix insisted on no interruptions. It was like a dead weight on his chest was beginning to ease, and the more he explained, the better he seemed to feel. He had been keeping so much inside, that it was a relief to explain it to the two, even if they didn't believe him afterwards.

Felix explained what had happened when he reached Prox: how the elders of Prox had practically forced him into helping Saturos and Menardi on their quest. He'd refused, somewhat bravely, and demanded an explanation before he'd consider stepping foot into their quest. That was when his beliefs were challenged. Felix carefully explained to Isaac and Jenna about Prox's beliefs concerning the Elemental Stars and the Lighthouses, and compared them with Vale's. Both listened intently as Felix explained that Prox wanted to light the Lighthouses.

The next part was tough. Felix then explained that he believed in Prox's versions of events, as there was solid proof, for one, and their legends made a lot more sense than Vale's. Proxian civilians weren't kept in the dark about the reasoning behind their legends, and after a couple of months, Felix said that he had begun to believe them himself. Thus, he had begun his training for the arduous journey back to Vale, and Sol Sanctum.

"You *believed* them?" Isaac asked in disbelief. "You're there for what, a few months, and already you're ready to abandon Vale and just drop everything you've ever learned?"

"If you'd have been in my position, you would have done the same. I'm not abandoning Vale's teachings, because some are true. However, the legends about the Elemental Stars and Lighthouses are completely biased."

"How do you work that one out?" Isaac demanded. "Why? Why would Vale's tutors have reason to lie to us? You're not making sense, Felix."

"Perhaps if you considered that there's more outside the box, then you'd begin to realise that you can't be right all the time," said Felix coolly. Jenna sensed the inevitable argument.

"You said Prox had proof that the Lighthouses needed to be lit. What was it? The elders of Vale have always been able to justify their teachings..."

"They lied," said Felix, turning to his sister. Isaac gave a snort of disbelief. Felix ignored him and continued. "They didn't want Vale to know about the Elemental Stars, in case somebody wanted to steal them and take the power for their own, selfish purposes. What Vale's elders don't know is that Weyard is slowly crumbling. The world is a lot smaller than it used to be, and Prox have maps to prove it. Also...close to the Mars Lighthouse is a void. It's where the world ends." Felix paused to let these words sink in.

"...Ends?" Jenna asked after a moment's silence. "What, it just stops, just like that?"

"Saturos and Menardi took me out there once, to prove Prox's teachings. The ground just ended. There was a line where it ended, and then after the line was nothing. I couldn't explain...but there was no light, no dark, no sound, nothing."

Isaac and Jenna were silent, thinking about these words. It wasn't easy to think that there was a very definite end to the world.

"So," began Isaac sceptically, "what does that have to do with the Lighthouses?"

"According to the ancient documents of Prox, the world started eroding after the Lighthouses were extinguished-"

"Typical!" exclaimed Isaac, looking furious. "The documents would have to be from Prox, wouldn't they? How convenient for them! How do you know they didn't make it up, huh? Why are you accusing Vale of lying?"

"Because I've seen solid proof," said Felix angrily, "and believe me, it makes much more sense than the mumbo jumbo that Vale's elders have been spoon feeding us all these years!"

" 'Mumbo jumbo'?" Isaac jumped to his feet. "You live here for fifteen years, and then you go gallivanting off to Prox, and suddenly Vale looks like the liar?"

"Just because you refuse to believe anything that isn't put right in front of your nose doesn't mean that it can't exist," snapped Felix, also standing. He glared at Isaac. "You always think that you're in the right, and the rest of Weyard is wrong. There are other places beside Vale!"

"STOP ARGUING!" Jenna jumped between the two and held her arms out, blocking the steadily advancing pair. "Isaac, let Felix speak. He might be right! And Felix, you have to understand where Isaac's coming from. It's all we've been taught..."

Felix and Isaac glared at each other, before reluctantly sitting down again. Jenna sighed in relief. "Thank you. Felix, you're saying that Saturos and Menardi are going to re-light the Lighthouses?"

"Yes. They have to, in order to stop the world from eating itself."

There was a thick silence, in which Jenna gazed at Felix. *He could be right. Why else would he travel with them? Felix wouldn't let the world die.*

"But, Vale's teachings..." Isaac looked toward the small Sanctum. "They say that Alchemy's dangerous. If the Lighthouses are lit, then Alchemy could destroy Weyard."

"If the Lighthouses are left unlit, Weyard will die anyway. Gaia Falls is eating the surface of the world. Alchemy is only dangerous if misused – at least that's a preventable thing." Felix stared into the river again.

"Hang on, I've heard this before," Jenna frowned into the grass; her memory providing a sense of déjà vu.

"Kraden...Kraden said something about the Lighthouses, and Alchemy. I think...that's why he wanted to investigate Sol Sanctum. I remember him saying something about how Vale's teachings were vague. They don't explain the whole story, apparently. Isaac, this makes sense!"

Isaac listened in silence. He had always accepted the teachings of Vale without question. The elders had no reason to lie to them...or did they? Though he hated to admit it, Felix was right, there were other places outside of Vale. Was that why Vale was so fenced off from the rest of Weyard? He had been silent for too long; Felix and Jenna were looking at him, waiting for a response. He grunted. "A little bit. Yeah.

I'm not saying I believe you though, Felix. But Jenna's right, it does sort of make sense..."

Jenna beamed at him. "But..." her face turned serious, "there was a reason why they needed you, Felix. Why? Does it have something to do with the Lighthouses?"

"The Proxian teachings say that to light the Lighthouses, an Adept of the corresponding element is needed. Saturos and Menardi are both Mars Adepts, so Mars Lighthouse wouldn't have been a problem. Alex is Mercury, and I guess that explains the blue light everyone saw a few days ago. Mercury must've been lit. And I'm Venus, obviously. Apparently I was needed to open the Venus Lighthouse once we came to it."

"So why did you leave? You said you believed Prox's teachings. Why stop them from lighting Venus?" Isaac asked, suspicion in his eyes.

Felix's own eyes darkened, and he looked to the sky almost angrily. "There are plenty of other Venus Adepts. I wasn't exactly indispensable. And after what happened in Sol Sanctum...well, they can find someone else." He refused to go into further detail, though Isaac knew that he was talking about the events in the Inner Sanctum just after Jenna had been kidnapped.

Another silence descended, before Felix gathered up the courage to say the next part. "There's something else," he said, still looking at the sky. "Isaac, Jenna..."

"Yes?" asked Jenna tentatively, noticing his sudden mood change.

"Our parents. Your father, Isaac. I...wasn't the only survivor that night. The boulder merely swept us downstream. We

were injured, but not too badly." Jenna's eyes were like saucers, and Isaac was looking at Felix in disbelief.

"Are you...are you saying...?"

"Our parents are alive?" Jenna asked in hushed, unbelieving tones, staring at Felix. He nodded.

Jenna let out a shriek, and she grabbed Isaac and hugged him tightly. He was still staring at Felix, not daring to believe it.

"You're telling the truth?"

Felix smiled. Isaac's face lit up, and his mouth split into a large grin.

"They're alive! They're alive!" Jenna jumped up and down in excitement. "Are they all right? Where are they? Three years! I haven't seen them in three years! What're they like? Has mum's hair grown? She said she wanted to grow it! And dad! Did they ask about me? I can't believe it!"

"Yeah, where are they, if they survived?" Isaac's grin faltered. "Didn't they want to come back? Wait..." he paled, "they're not in *Prox*?"

Felix swallowed heavily and nodded. Jenna stopped jumping around, and looked at Felix in horror. "Prox? Prox? Why are they there?" She sounded afraid.

"That's why I finally agreed to help Saturos and Menardi. They said that they wouldn't let us go back to Vale as a family unless I helped them with their quest."

"They're hostages? Oh no!" Jenna gasped.

"Unless you helped them?" Isaac was white. "Then...what'll happen to them now? You're not helping them any more!"

"I didn't tell you at first because I knew you'd react like this. I've been trying to figure out how to go and rescue them for ages, but I didn't want to involve you."

"Didn't want to involve us?" Jenna repeated. "But, they're our parents! Of course we want to be involved!"

"I didn't want you to get hurt!" Felix looked at his sister in exasperation.

"Oh, and going alone won't kill you at all, will it not?" Isaac asked sarcastically. "Do us a favour, and stop acting the hero!" Felix glared at him.

"I'm not 'acting the hero'!"

"Before we start arguing again!" Jenna shouted, glaring at them both. They both fell silent. "Thank you. So, what's the plan?"

"The...plan?" Felix asked, looking at his sister with some suspicion. "You can't mean-"

"Yes. You're not going alone, Felix. They're our *parents*."

"Jenna's right," Isaac nodded. "If you go back to Prox without having lit the Lighthouses, then they'll probably kill you-"

"They're not that bad-"

"EVEN so," Isaac stood slowly, staring at the entrance to Vale. "We can't risk leaving them. If Prox find out that you've left Saturos and Menardi, they'll probably kill our parents." Behind him, Jenna paled slightly.

"They lit Mercury a few days ago," said Felix, apparently lost in thought. "So it means that they haven't gone back to Prox yet. Prox won't know that I'm not with Saturos and Menardian anymore. We have some time..."

"So, it's decided," Jenna said, her tone final. "We'll go to Prox and rescue our parents!"

"All three of us," said Isaac firmly. Felix reluctantly nodded his head.

"How do we leave Vale, though? I hardly think the elders will let us go. 'You're too young!' they'll say. But we can't get through the gate without their permission..." Jenna chewed her thumbnail thoughtfully.

"We'll need all our persuasive skills. I think...I think that also means we'll need the mayor's backing. And for that, we'll need..."

"Garet!" Jenna walked into Garet's house, closely followed by Felix and Isaac. He looked up, and grinned at them.

"Hey! How's it going?"

"Listen, we need a favour..."

Jenna, Felix and Isaac explained briefly that they needed to leave Vale to rescue their parents. Garet, bewildered at first, agreed after hearing a summary of what had happened to them. They shortened the story even further when explaining to Garet's grandfather about why they needed to leave Vale, but thankfully, with a little persuasion from Garet, the mayor agreed to accompany them to see the elders.

As they walked to the small elders' Sanctum, Gareth matched his pace with Jenna's. "So, how have you been?"

Jenna smiled at him. "All right. It's good to have Felix around again. And now I find out that our parents are alive! But...I suppose I'm worried about everything that's to come. I mean, a whole town full of people like Saturos and Menardi? Scary."

Gareth chuckled. "I can't say I blame you. But with Felix and Isaac there too, I think you'll be all right. One question – how will you get there? Last I heard Prox was across a vast opening of water."

"We're going to try to find a ship," Jenna answered. "We checked a couple of maps, and the closest town specialising in ships is a small place called Madra. If they can't lend us a ship, then they'll probably be able to recommend somewhere. Hopefully we'll find one quickly. The longer we leave it, the more time that Saturos and Menardi get to report back to Prox and tell them that Felix abandoned them."

They reached the Sanctum. "I shall speak first," said Gareth's grandfather. "If the elders hear it from a reliable person first, it will set up a better impression."

They walked inside, and proceeded to explain their situation to the elders. The mayor performed a fine persuasive speech, and after Felix and the others had explained the story further, the elders looked close to agreeing to let them out of the gates.

"After considering your story," the Grand Elder surveyed the group through wise eyes, "I shall agree to let you leave Vale for your parents. However, there is a time-consuming condition."

Jenna chewed her lip nervously. What could that mean? Time-consuming? They didn't have a lot of time to reach their parents...the Grand Elder must have meant that they undertake the condition after the safe rescue of their parents.

"Once you acquire a ship, I must ask you to stop the fiends from lighting the Elemental Lighthouses."

Isaac, Jenna and Felix looked at one another. That meant stopping the one thing that prevented the destruction of Weyard...Jenna was about to say something, but was stopped with a significant look from Felix.

"We agree, Grand Elder," said Isaac, nodding his head. "We shall do everything in our power to stop them from lighting the remaining Lighthouses."

Jenna understood. They didn't have time to explain to the elders about the Lighthouses. Once they had rescued their parents, then they could worry about the Lighthouse situation.

"Then, it is decided," said the Grand Elder, looking upon them with a smile on his face. "Tomorrow morning, you shall embark on your quest. I shall inform the gate guardians. Now, I advise you to get some rest. And, one more thing," he added as they turned to go back to their respective houses, "Good luck."

Wow, this one took a while to write. I had a bit of writer's block in the early part of this, but then it flowed quite nicely. I hope it wasn't too dull or anything.

Alex: Zzzz

Good support from my muse, as always. Reviews and construtive criticism is greatly appreciated.

***Chapter 3*: Acquaintance**

Here's chapter three for your reading pleasure. I hope you enjoy! Thank you to my lovely reviewers for reviewing!

The next morning, Jenna woke at dawn, unable to sleep for long. As she packed a few essentials into a small pouch to be tied at her waist, her mind wandered onto the quest. Jenna had never before stepped foot out of Vale, and then suddenly she was expected to explore half of Weyard. True, if they kept quiet about Saturos and Menardi's mission whilst in Prox, they wouldn't encounter too much resistance, but Jenna couldn't help being nervous.

"How are you feeling?" Felix's warm voice floated through Jenna's bedroom door. Jenna straightened and smiled nervously at its owner.

"Like I've just eaten a bowl of live snakes for breakfast. You?"

"Well, with me it's butterflies. I'd wager that they taste nicer than snakes, but the effect is more or less the same." Felix walked over to where Jenna had sat on the edge of her bed, and he perched next to her. "I'm pretty nervous myself."

"But you've been to Prox before," Jenna couldn't keep her nerves out of her voice, "so you know a few of them, right?"

Felix laughed softly. "I was almost a prisoner there. Forced to train – I wasn't able to get to know the residents. A few might recognise my face, especially Menardi's sister. She used to sit in during my training sessions and criticise me." Felix grinned. Karst had been annoying at times, but her upbeat personality always got him through Saturos' demanding training sessions. "As long as we don't run into

the elders. If they see me before their quest is completed, I know for a fact that we won't be welcome."

"We'll be fine," Jenna said, trying to sound confidently cheerful and failing. "Once our parents are with us and out of Prox, I doubt they'll go out of their way to re-capture them."

"True."

Twenty minutes later, Jenna and Felix had forced down some breakfast, and were preparing to leave. Their concerned grandparents, who had been overjoyed to see Felix alive after three years, gave them last minute tips and advice, and then hugged them, half hoping the siblings would change their minds about going. It was an emotional goodbye, but Felix and Jenna promised to return safely, with their parents.

As the two walked toward Vale's entrance, Gareth jogged down from his house and met the two.

"Isaac's on his way, he's just saying goodbye to his mother," Gareth matched their pace, and the three made their way down to the large gate. "What do we do first then, after we leave Vale?"

"We're planning to head to Madr-"

"We?" Felix stopped, staring at Gareth. Jenna caught on, and gasped, looking at Gareth with large eyes.

"You're coming with us?"

"Since when?" Felix asked suspiciously.

"Isaac and I talked about it for most of last night. It's not going to be an easy trip, and I want to help any way I can."

"Garet," began Jenna, but he interrupted.

"Four are stronger than three, correct?" Garet smiled at the two. "You've been my best friends for years. It took a lot to persuade my parents to let me go, but it'll be worth it. If it means saving your parents, then I'm all for it. Besides, it will be easier to stop the Sol Sanctum guys from lighting the Lighthouses with four of us."

Felix and Jenna said nothing. They hadn't told Garet that they actually planned on letting the antagonists light the Elemental Lighthouses, as they knew that this news would reach the mayor. Once that happened, the elders of Vale would panic even more about the "great catastrophe" that was supposed to happen then the Lighthouses were lit, and Vale would be thrown into turmoil.

"All right, you can come," said Felix, somewhat reluctantly. "You're right, it would be a little easier with four of us."

The three reached the gates to find Isaac sitting on the grass. As they approached, he stood, and they noticed that his stance suggested nervousness, too. "Ready?" he asked them, a look of grim determination set on his face.

The four Adepts walked through the open gates. The guards applauded as they walked past, and shouted wishes of good luck. Jenna grinned.

"We're celebrities! Maybe they'll throw a massive party when we get back."

"Yeah, and I'll be the guest of honour." Isaac smirked at Jenna. "Isaac the Hero. Or Isaac the Valiant. They have a ring

to them."

"Felix sounds better," Felix said matter-of-factly. Jenna punched his arm playfully.

"Never mind that, imagine all the food that they would cook in our honour!" Gareth glanced back at Vale, which was now barely visible, with something akin to hunger in his eyes.

"Your mother's an excellent cook, Isaac, she'd probably cook me a big, fat, juicy steak with all the trimmings."

Feeling somewhat light heartened by the banter, the four set off for Madra without looking back once.

It was a somewhat exhausted group that walked through the gates of Madra two evenings later. They had had no choice but to traverse some steep hills to reach Gondowan, and then the rivers they had been forced to cross were treacherous. There was one terrifying moment when Jenna had lost her footing in one of Gondowan's larger rivers, and had almost been swept downstream. Thankfully, Felix and Isaac had reacted quickly with their Venus Psynergy, felling a large tree to block the flow of the river temporarily.

"Well, you can't say it wasn't an eventful journey," commented Gareth as the four exhausted teenagers walked into the inn. They collapsed onto some comfortable looking chairs as Felix booked a couple of rooms for them. Jenna sighed loudly, and eased her aching feet out of her boots. Isaac jokingly wafted the air, earning a shove from the Mars Adept.

"So, what's the plan?" asked Isaac as Felix joined them.

"We rest, and then tomorrow we search the town for a boat. I'm sure the mayor will help us out," Felix yawned and

stretched. "When we find a ship, we'll leave straight away. The sooner we go, the better."

"Erm...question," Jenna sat up, frowning, a thought occurring to her. "Do you actually know the way to Prox, Felix?"

Felix stilled. That was something he had neglected to think about when planning the rescue of his parents. Jenna paled slightly. "What if we get lost? It'll take even longer to get to our parents. And then it might be too late..."

Felix hesitated before answering. "Don't worry, I'm sure one of the residents of Madra carries a map. I know for certain that Prox is to the far north...with the help of a map, I could pinpoint the location. Few know of Prox and its location, so it won't be marked on an ordinary map."

"All right," said Jenna uncertainly, relaxing back onto the armchair.

The four ate, and then departed to bed, agreeing to meet early the next morning, so they could get a head start on finding a ship. For a good portion of the night, Jenna tossed and turned, unable to get to sleep. Felix hadn't sounded very confident when speaking of finding a map, and Jenna doubted that the sleepy town of Madra would provide a map that could pinpoint any location in the world. However, being quite a nautical town, surely someone, somewhere, would hold a sea chart. And with that slightly reassuring thought, Jenna fell asleep.

The next morning was a cheerful one. The sun shined brightly, and it was quite warm considering that it was close to winter. The citizens of Madra went about their daily business in good moods. In the inn, Felix, Jenna, Isaac and Garet had already awoken, and were sitting in the same

armchairs as the previous night, discussing the best way to find a ship.

"If we split up, we'll get through the residents much faster," Isaac pointed out.

"If we do, we'll need something to tell the others if we find something," said Jenna. "A signal or something. Madra doesn't appear to be the smallest of towns, and it would delay us if we had to spend half a day searching for the others."

"Fair point," commented Gareth. "Maybe we should meet here again in, say, three hours. If one of us is successful, then we could grab a quick lunch, and then try to acquire the ship."

"Good idea," said Felix. "Right, we'll go individually. I'll head to the northern part of town, and ask the residents there. Jenna, take the west side of town. Isaac, you should be all right in the south, and Gareth, the east also holds a lot of residents. We'll meet back here at lunchtime."

The plan was decided, and each went their separate ways. Jenna wandered over to the western side of town, and was mildly surprised to find a jail. Crime had never been a large issue in Vale, as if something was stolen, it would be very easy to track down the culprit. However, Jenna had read about such places in Kraden's history books, and hadn't liked the sound of them. Cold, harsh, and only accommodating the worst of criminals, jail was the last place Jenna wanted to visit. However, Jenna wouldn't know if the guard had any information if she didn't ask. Taking in a deep breath, she stepped through the entrance into the cold jail.

The cells were empty except for the one at the end of the row. Not wanting to attract the attention of a potentially dangerous criminal, Jenna quietly made her way to a small

desk at the centre of the building, where a guard was fast asleep on a chair. "Umm...excuse me," whispered Jenna, not wanting to raise her voice. She shivered involuntarily - Kraden's books were correct, the place was damp and cold. Swallowing a nervous shudder, Jenna stepped slightly closer to the guard, and raised her voice only slightly. "Sir? I need to speak with you."

Still nothing. Jenna resisted the urge to kick the nearest leg of the desk, but decided that poking the guard wouldn't be a good idea. "Sir!" She didn't shout, but did raise her voice again. The guard snorted, shifted slightly, and continued slumbering.

"It's no use, he sleeps through anything." The voice startled Jenna, and she jumped and whipped around to face the entrance, but there was nobody there. She realised with a jolt that it had come from the occupied cell at the end of the row. Jenna hesitated, and then stepped forward slowly. She didn't know him; for all she knew, he could be as harmless as she. Jenna stepped into the light, and finally saw the prisoner. He wasn't like anybody she'd seen before. Though his profile sat in shadow, she could make out blue clothing, patterned in a foreign design. A slight beam of sunlight reflected off his blue hair, and for one heart-stopping moment, Jenna thought it was the Alex person from Sol Sanctum. But then, she said to herself as her heart returned to a normal beat, Alex had been a slight person, whereas this person in the jail appeared to have very toned muscles. He wouldn't have any difficulty beating somebody up. But his voice hadn't contained any menace. Intrigued despite herself, she cleared her throat.

"Oh, that's a pity, I needed to ask him something."

"Perhaps I can help?" he suggested, his tone light. Jenna raised her eyebrows sceptically, and to her surprise, he laughed. It was a deep, rich laugh, and Jenna couldn't help thinking that somebody stuck in a place such as this shouldn't laugh so genuinely. "Don't let my current position put you off. I know quite a bit about this place." He laughed again, but his tone held an edge of bitterness.

"All right. You're going to think it's a strange question, though."

"Fire away," said he, his tone suggesting he was interested in what she had to say.

"Well...I'm travelling with my brother and two friends, and we need to access a place that's across the ocean. I've heard this town holds some information on ships, and we need to find a ship we can hire quite urgently." Jenna didn't go into details. After all, the man was in jail for a reason, and she had only just met him.

To her surprise, she could almost *sense* him smiling. And sure enough, the light provided enough for Jenna to see his mouth curved into an ironic smile. Wondering what on earth she could have said to make him smile like that, she moved forward, and was now very close to the bars of his cell.

"How incredibly ironic. I happen to have a ship myself."

"What?" Jenna could hardly believe her ears. "You...you have one? Seriously?"

"Yes. It's quite a large ship, easily large enough to accommodate six or seven people."

Was he suggesting that Jenna and her companions could borrow his ship? Jenna could hardly dare to believe it; in

fact, it was almost too easy...

"Does...does that mean that you're willing to lend us your ship?" Jenna breathed, crossing her fingers behind her back.

"Yes," he said, his tone conditional. Jenna didn't notice, however, and she jumped into the air in celebration.

"Oh, thank you! Thank you so much! Just one question. Why? We've only just met, how do you know you can trust us?" *And how do we know we can trust you? This is a bit easy...*

"I...have a sixth sense about these things," he replied. "You obviously need a ship quite urgently, and I can sense that you're not lying."

Jenna frowned slightly. This *was* too easy. She shifted forward so she was holding onto the cell bars, staring into his shadowy face. "What's the catch?" she asked slowly.

Again, she could feel him smiling. "Ah, you are perceptive. Well...I am the only one able to power my ship. It needs a certain...ahm...boost, and I am the only one able to provide you with that."

Jenna's spirits deflated rapidly. "So...if you only lend us the ship, we won't be able to move it?" She saw his silhouette nod slowly. "And if you have to power it...you're not suggesting breaking out of here?" she asked in disbelief. He nodded again. "Well, if you can break out, why haven't you already?"

"That's the thing. I can't break out. There are certain restrictions that prevent me from trying to escape. And your timing coming here was perfect. I don't think I could survive in this cell for much longer..."

"You want...you want me to help you?" Jenna asked in a loud, strangled gasp. Behind her, the guard gave a snort in his sleep, but did not wake. The man in jail hurried forward, panicking about Jenna's volume, and it was then that she got a full glimpse of him.

His clothes were definitely foreign, though from where Jenna couldn't tell. They were a mixture of blues, greens and yellows, and suited his tanned skin well. He *did* have large muscles, but despite this, Jenna knew that he wasn't the type to use them regularly. In fact, his posture seemed to suggest that of a calm, slightly worried warrior. His hair was indeed blue, only a few shades darker than Alex's, and Jenna briefly wondered if they hailed from the same place. It was his eyes, however, that captured Jenna's attention. They were so *unusual*. A strange mixture of amber and hazel, they seemed to go on forever, revealing a wealth of emotions. Jenna couldn't believe how deep they were, and how much of the man's personality came through them. She could decipher his current emotions even though she wasn't particularly close. He was calm, collected, slightly anxious (probably from being trapped in jail), and didn't appear to be angry at her hesitation at all. And most of all, he wasn't threatening. Jenna relaxed slightly, though she was still doubtful of his request.

He stepped up to the bars, so they were practically hugging each other. Jenna could see the desperation in his soulful eyes, and wondered what on earth he had done to earn him a cell in jail. "It was a mistake. An error," he said, reading her thoughts. "The people of Madra thought I was an enemy. They've been the victims of outsider attacks recently, and they took no chances when I appeared here. As you can probably decipher, I am not from Madra," he said dryly. "I come from across the ocean."

"That explains the ship," said Jenna, intrigued. But what did he mean when he spoke of errors?

"I'm not a particularly strong sailor, and alone, I was vulnerable to anything. One day, when attempting to navigate a dangerous part of the ocean, a storm caught me off guard. I don't remember much, aside from seeing my ship take a few hefty hits. When I woke, I was here. My ship had drifted to Indra after the storm died down, and thank goodness it landed without further damage."

"So, you were wrongly imprisoned? Just because your ship landed near here?" Jenna stared at the man, not knowing whether to believe him or not. She bit her lip, not knowing what to say next. It seemed a bit far-fetched, and yet, it seemed to explain why the man seemed so miserable in the jail. A notorious crook wouldn't be so disheartened when facing a jail sentence.

"You don't believe me," he said flatly, his eyes dulling slightly. Jenna quickly shook her head.

"It's not that! It's just that...well...I've only just met you. I don't know you well enough to judge whether you're being honest."

"I see. In that case, I shall simply have to remain here until somebody decides that I'm innocent," with that, he retreated back into the shadows, so Jenna couldn't discern his emotions.

"I'm not saying you're not innocent," said Jenna, a bite of impatience in her voice. "Look, the bottom line is that if I help you escape, and you betray us and sail off in your ship without helping, then we'll be in a worse position than now. I can't afford to take that chance. Lives are at stake."

He said nothing. Jenna's annoyance grew. "All right, how about this? I find a way to prove your innocence. Just tell me what I need to do, and I'll try to the best of my ability."

"Why? All you need is a ship. You've said it yourself – you don't have time for anything else. There are plenty of ships in the world," he said coolly.

"Fine," said Jenna tartly, and she turned on her heel and stalked out of the jail. The morning sunlight felt warm on her face, and she couldn't help feeling guilty. She had been a bit blunt, but she had good reason not to trust the man. After all, even though he had seemed genuinely honest when telling his story, Jenna couldn't help thinking that he could be a well-practiced liar. And he had been correct in saying that she really didn't have the time to wander around Indra, finding the evidence for his supposed innocence.

Now what? she thought. It was almost lunchtime, but Jenna didn't want to speak of her experience in the jail to the other three. They would question her as to why she didn't try harder to acquire the ship. Felix would chastise her for speaking with a "dangerous" criminal...wait, Felix! He was her brother, and she needed to vent her feelings of the jail experience to somebody. Felix would listen, and maybe he would even hold a solution. Maybe, after all, they would gain the use of the man's ship. That decided, Jenna headed to the northern area of Madra, intending on finding her brother, and hoping that he had an answer.

I'm not going to be one of those authors who ask for a specific amount of reviews before I update again. But reviews and constructive criticism are very much appreciated. I've noticed that while the hits to this story appear to be many, reviewers are few, and I love to hear

how I'm progressing, so I can improve my writing. A massive thank you to my current reviewers, you're all stars :)

Alex: Maybe you should start paying people to review. It's a wonder that people review this without bribes- oww!

Ahh, the faithful stapler. Always on hand to rid me of my annoying muse for a short time. I hope you enjoyed, and please say if you did :)